

## Tips for Public Speaking

So, you've been asked to give a talk. Fear of speaking to a group is very common and natural. Preparation and practice are the keys.

First, get the details.

- Time and date - when you should arrive, the time of your talk and how long they want you to stay
- Place -- Get directions
- Contact person - who you call with any last minute details (snow storms, illness, etc.)
- How should you dress?
- How many people are likely to attend?
- Who are they? - demographics, parents?, seniors?, members of a group?
- Can you bring materials to hand out?
- What is the purpose of the talk - a lecture for students who will be tested on the content or a light speech for a senior group meant to entertain?
- What is your topic? Can you re-work a prior talk?
- Will you be part of a panel of speakers with only 5 to 10 minutes to fill or are you the only speaker for an hour?
- Are you the first speaker or last? What are the topics of the other talks?
- What equipment will be available? PowerPoint, wipe board, flip chart, microphone, etc.

Preparation separates great talks from the others.

- Is your topic one you are comfortable with or do you need some more research?
- Can you re-work a prior talk?
- Do you have materials to hand out or do you need to develop some? Can you update something you already have? Handouts are nice because you don't have to say everything and they don't have to remember anything specific.
- Prepare your introduction or bio - usually someone else will need to describe you to the audience before you begin, write something for them to say

Write the talk.

- Have a beginning, a middle and a conclusion
- Try to make only a few points, most people listening will only remember one or two messages from your talk so choose them carefully
- It is helpful if you give them an action step at the end - you have them convinced of your message by your impeccable logic, then what? Be constructive about the action step - not "Work for world peace" but "Call your Senator about tomorrow's vote. His number is \_\_\_\_\_"
- You can refer to your handouts for a fuller explanation if time is an issue, you don't have to give every detail in your talk
- Build toward your conclusion
- Use language and concepts that are appropriate to the audience - obviously a talk on tobacco will be different for third graders than for a group of doctors

- Speak from your heart - your own experiences and analysis are extremely compelling, no one else can tell your story
- If appropriate, look for quotes, stories, jokes, etc. that add to your point.
- Leave time for questions and/or discussion
- Consider using visuals
  - Writing your main points on an overhead or wipe board adds emphasis and provides natural breaks in the talk
  - Having your main points in a visual means you won't miss anything
  - Visuals help make complex or technical information understandable
  - PowerPoint or other presentation software programs can be useful tools, but are hardly a necessity
- Print the final notes for your speech large enough to read at a glance

Remember to bring with you:

- At least two copies of your notes
- Your introduction/bio
- Any visuals you will need
- Handouts - bring more than you think you'll need
- If you are using PowerPoint, bring overheads as well - just in case
- Your glasses, if you need them
- Directions
- Your contact information - business cards or brochures or just paper and a pen to write it down if someone asks
- Water - not bubbly soda (I won't go into why)

To help relax:

- Remember that everyone there has been in your situation and can identify
- Practice your talk - as often as you need to so you feel comfortable with it
- Practice in front of a gentle critic, then listen to their feedback
- Check out the setting ahead of time
- Arrive early, introduce yourself to the audience and other speakers as they come in
- Practice using microphones or other equipment, fix problems before the talk
- Check yourself in the restroom mirror before starting - you'll feel better knowing that you don't have salad stuck in your teeth
- Take a breath - those empty moments seem much longer to you than to them
- Speak slowly, don't race through to get it over with
- Smile - why should they have a good time if you aren't?
- Use as casual a style as you can - both you and they will relax
- Stand behind something (a podium, a table, etc.) or wear your glasses
- Refer to your notes
- Don't mention your nervousness - maybe they didn't notice
- Know that an hour from now you will be relaxing after a job well done

After the talk:

- Evaluate - Did you get your major points across? Were there questions? What was the feedback from the audience and the organizers? How did you feel?
- Save the information from the talk and the thank you letter you should get (if you ever invite a speaker, but sure to write a thank you letter). You may want to follow

up with the group with any action steps from your talk and/or later for coalition building, etc.

- Remember that the next time will be easier